



The Toda and The Tahr

E.R.C. Davidar



Rs. 10.50/-

National Book Trust, India



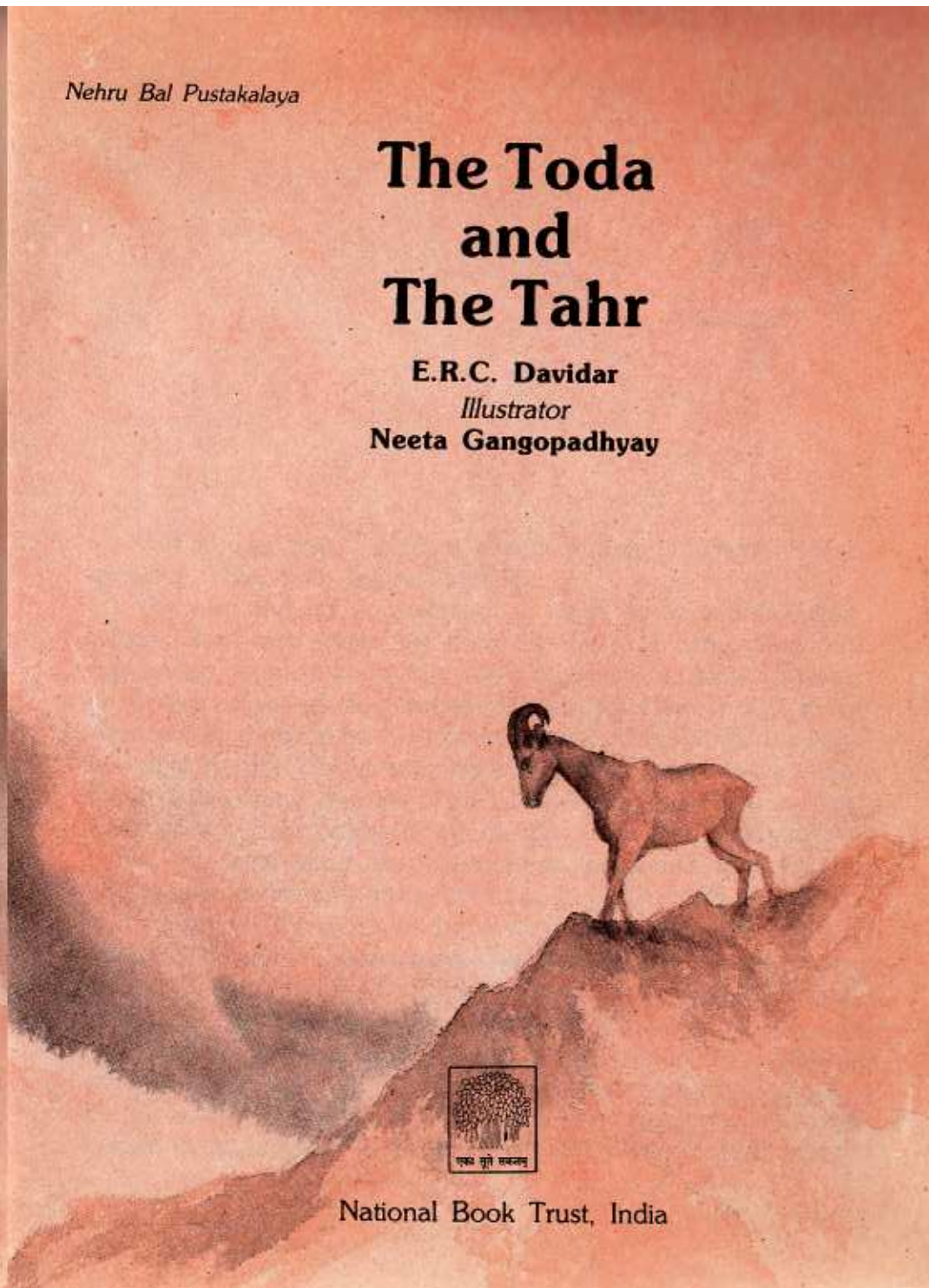
Nehru Bal Pustakalaya

The Toda and The Tahr

E.R.C. Davidar

Illustrator

Neeta Gangopadhyay



National Book Trust, India

The Toda and The Tahr

E.R.C. Davidar

Illustrator

Newa Ganapathy

ISBN 81-237-1496-3

First Edition 1991 (Saka 1913)

First Reprint 1995 (Saka 1917)

© E.R.C. Davidar, 1991

Rs. 10.50

Published by the Director, National Book Trust, India
A-5, Green Park, New Delhi-110 016



I

"What was that?" Karnoz asked sharply. His dog Kooch growled. They both listened intently.

The boy and his dog were on a ledge on a mountain-side, which jutted into space. At their feet lay a chasm, deep and frightening. As they stood listening, the call was repeated. It was a cry of distress and it was becoming fainter. But it was enough to tell Karnoz that the sound came from a narrow strip of jungle between two cliffs. Karnoz, closely followed by Kooch, rushed down a steep, rocky path towards the sound. He had to be careful. One false step would send him hurtling down the precipice that bordered the track. The small wood they entered was damp and dark. Karnoz had to slow down and grope about in the gloom. When his eyes had adjusted to the dim light, he saw a young Nilgiri tahr caught in a snare. The animal gave a last feeble bleat, stopped struggling and lay still. Karnoz thought it was dead. The wire of the snare had cut deeply into its neck and the animal was bleeding.

Karnoz passed his hand lightly over the animal. There was no other visible injury, though he could feel its heart pounding rapidly. He sat beside the animal and loosened the snare gently. The kid gulped in air in great gasps. Karnoz carried it to a small spring.

There he bathed the young tahr's wound and dressed it with leaves of plants which he had seen his people use to heal wounds.

"Look after our young friend," Karnoz ordered his dog. Then he searched the strip of forest for more snares. Sure enough there were three more. They were cunningly set on game trails used by tahr crossing from one section of the cliff to the other. The snare would pass over the neck or body of an animal that walked through it and hold it. As the trapped animal struggled to free itself, the noose would tighten and choke it to death. If the snare caught it round the body or a leg it would starve to death. It was a cruel way to capture animals. Karnoz was furious.

Karnoz knew who the culprits were. They were tribals who lived in the jungle below and were hunters and trappers. Karnoz wondered how they had found their way there. He did not know of any track leading over the cliffs into the jungle below. Then he remembered seeing a party of hunters on the cliff line some days ago. He wished he had followed them to find out what they were doing. He tore the snares from the trees to which they were anchored and threw them down a cliff where no one could reach them.

The cry of the young tahr in distress had attracted others besides Karnoz. Two of the hunter tribe who happened to be hunting in the jungle below heard it. They hurried to claim their prize.

The strip of forest where Karnoz found the trapped tahr fell away abruptly. Karnoz stood there wondering how the hunters planned to visit their traps. Cautiously he moved forward to investigate. At his feet lay a well plaited rope made of cane. It reached right down to the jungle below, which at this point was not far away. As Karnoz watched, the rope suddenly came to life and



wriggled like a snake. He leaned forward to have a better look and in so doing almost tumbled over. Two hunters were climbing up the side of the precipice with the help of the rope and one of them had almost reached the top. The man's fingers groped for a handhold to pull himself up. He glared into the boy's eyes, trying to frighten him into inaction. Karnoz's blood froze. Suddenly he remembered the wood cutting knife he had in his hand. He made as if to cut the rope. Now it was the hunter's turn to be frightened. Shouting a warning to his companion, he slid down the rope as rapidly as possible. Karnoz waited until the men were about a dozen feet from the ground and then cut the rope. As they fell, he warned them, "This should teach you a lesson!"

To make sure that the poachers would not use their short-cut to the plateau for some time, Karnoz cut down the trees and plants that were likely to serve as a support for a rope ladder. While he was busy, the young tahr regained consciousness. When it opened its eyes, what should it see but a large fierce-looking dog staring at it! The young animal took fright. It decided that the best thing to do was to lie still and behave as though it were dead, a tactic used by some wild animals. It lay still until Karnoz returned.



II

The mountains were the Nilgiris, an offshoot of the chain known as the Western Ghats that run parallel to the south-western coastline of India. To the people in the plains, the mountains were a dominating presence that ruled their lives. They helped to bring rain, they made rivers and streams flow and filled the lakes. Yet, they were mountains of mystery. A wide belt of thick jungle around their base, the threat of wild animals and the dreaded malaria kept the people away. Viewed from far, most high mountains appear blue. The Nilgiris are deep blue, perhaps because the haze enveloping them is particularly dense, and the plains people named them the Nilagiri, meaning Blue Mountain. The British who loved anglicizing Indian names called it the Nilgiris, and Nilgiris it became.

The hill people also remained aloof in their mountain fastness. It was left to adventurous Englishmen to penetrate the blue haze and discover the Nilgiris' cool climate, beauty and grandeur, its people and its unique wildlife. This was in the 1820's. Thereafter the Blue Mountain ceased to be a remote island in a sea of jungle.

After rising sharply from the plains for two thousand metres the Nilgiri mountain spreads out into a large plateau of smooth, rolling

grass-covered hills. The British named some parts the 'Downs' after the Downs in the south of England. Originally, the Nilgiri plateau was a series of downs dotted with woods or 'sholas', as these evergreen woods are called. Classified as the southern montane wet temperate forest, they survive in the valleys and folds and are unique. The plateau inclines gently towards the west where it forms a distinct range which is marked by a line of peaks. This range, the Kundhas, is wild and remote. This is tahr country; it is also Toda country, the local tribe to which Karnoz belonged. Further west, the plateau plunges abruptly into the plains in an unbroken series of cliffs. Viewed from the western plains, the Nilgiris look like a giant fortress.

The Toda country is beautiful and idyllic. But it is not all sunshine and pleasure. It can be very harsh and severe. The south-west monsoon, which here takes the form of a continuous cold drizzle, sweeps the plateau with gale force winds for over two months from June. But the Todas love the monsoon because it brings them life-giving water. In their songs they speak of it with affection.

"The monsoon from Mt. Toas is coming, playing like a child.
The Pykara river is coming frisking like a calf,
The wind is playing the plantain clarinet,
The river is beating the jack tree drum,
The wind is playing a tune on all four sides,
The river is dancing like a cobra."

After a short break, the north-west monsoon, with its sudden heavy downpours, takes over, until a cold, freezing winter sets in. The life and ways of Karnoz and the Todas were adapted to this

environment. Todas live in settlements called 'munds' similar to small hamlets in the plains. Usually three or four huts make up a mund. The huts are small structures, architecturally appealing and well suited to the Nilgiri environment. In appearance a Toda hut resembles a large barrel cut in half lengthwise and much like a covered wagon. The only entrance is a tiny door. To go inside one has to bend low and crawl on all fours. Inside the hut, on one side of the door, a solid earthen platform serves as bed and sitting area. A hole opposite it and towards the rear is the fireplace. It is dark and smoky inside, as the windows are small. The roof is a neatly woven framework of bamboo and cane, thatched with grass. The hut is warm during the frosty winter and cool in summer. The rounded roof lets the roaring monsoon winds pass by without resistance and drains off the water quickly. The 'mund' ('mod' in the Toda language) sites are chosen with care—sheltered from cold winds, close to a stream, with a fine view and with good pasture for their buffaloes.

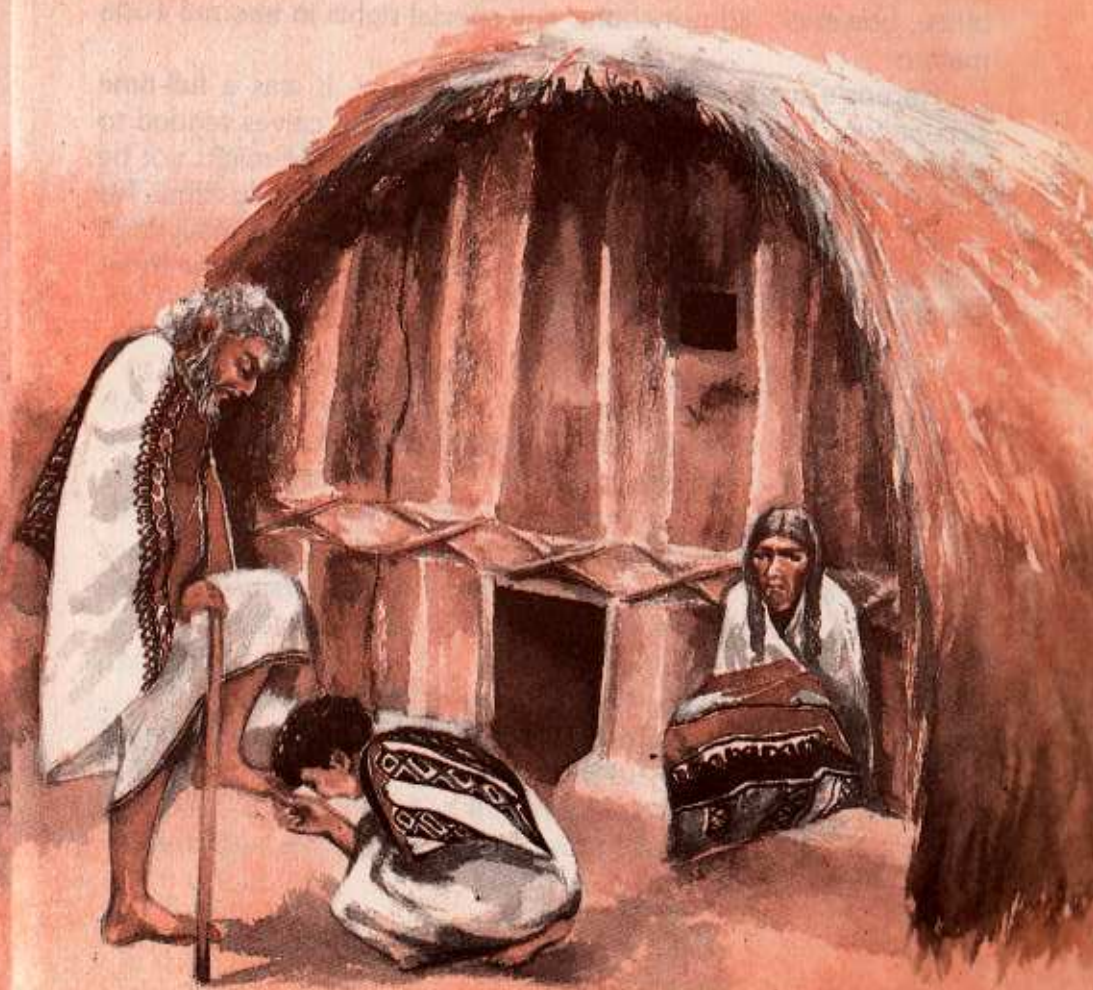


Karnoz was not sure how the young tahr would be received. He was in the habit of taking abandoned creatures home. Todas are fond of wild animals and do not harm them, preferring to see them in the wild. Every time Karnoz took some animal to Mofmund, his home—the last one a sambur fawn whose mother had been killed by a leopard—he was asked to take it back and release it. Even with Kooch there was much opposition. When Karnoz reached home with the tahr his mother objected, saying that another pet would be a nuisance. Karnoz pointed to the wound on the young animal's neck and asked, "Do you want me to feed him to the jackals?"

"If you want to keep him, get an Elder's permission," his mother ordered.

Karnoz at once thought of Kodan, who lived at the far end of the mund. He was a kind and understanding old man. Karnoz approached him and saluted him in the manner that was customary among Todas greeting their elders. The boy knelt before Kodan and bowed low, to let the elder lift his right foot and touch the boy's forehead with it. This was repeated with the other foot. Salutation over, Karnoz told Kodan about the tahr kid's rescue. Although the Todas and tahr had shared the Nilgiri plateau for centuries, they had never made close contact. The boy seemed so eager that Kodan did not have the heart to disappoint him. "You did right in rescuing the animal," he said. "Look after it well and let it join its herd when its wound has healed."

Toda society is truly democratic. There is no formal leader or headman. The highest body for resolving disputes relating to the observance of caste norms, religious matters and between groups, including property disputes, is the caste council called the *noym*. Every adult Toda can sit on this council. Next in authority are the



assemblies of sub-castes. In spite of not having a recognized leader some men wield considerable influence. Kodan was one such because of his wisdom and likable nature. When British administration was established in the hills a monegar was appointed for the Todas to deal with civil administration. In recognition of his influence with the Todas, Kodan was appointed to this post. The office, however, did not confer any special rights in internal Toda matters.

Karnoz's work was herding buffalo calves. It was a full-time occupation. Left alone even for a moment, the calves tended to scatter and get into trouble. Karnoz worried that he might not be able to look after the tahr kid properly. But fortunately Simil, his cousin, offered to look after it in his absence. She was equally fond of animals. Greatly relieved, Karnoz was able to devote time to his usual work.



III

The Todas are a pastoral people. Their social and economic life is centred around their buffalo herds. The Toda hill buffalo is a magnificent, large, powerfully built animal with long upward curving horns. It is quite unlike the slow-moving slovenly buffalo of the plains. It can be fierce. Even tigers avoid these buffaloes if they are in a group.

The buffaloes fall into two broad classes—those that belong to the sacred dairies and the others, that is, the secular ones. Sacred animals are graded according to their ritual standing. The Todas' religious observances, too, are largely focussed on their buffaloes. Although the sacred buffaloes are attached to the dairies, they are mostly privately owned. Only ghee processed from milk obtained from the sacred dairy herds can be sold to the public. Milk and other products obtained from secular buffaloes can be sold without any restriction.

The Todas are believed to be the earliest inhabitants of the Nilgiris. They are different from other tribes and peoples of south India in appearance, manners and customs. The men are tall, well-built and rugged like the mountains which are their home. Many of the older men grow flowing beards which enhance their

imposing appearance. The women, slender and graceful, wear their hair in long curls and are heavily tattooed. The Todas practise polyandry or the marriage of a woman to more than one husband. The polyandry practised by the Todas is of the fraternal type; when a woman marries a man she automatically marries all his brothers, like Draupadi, who was married to the five Pandava brothers. For the Todas this custom was necessitated by another practice they followed in earlier times. Being a pastoral people, their resources were limited and they could not afford to have a large population. So they allowed unwanted girl babies to die, mostly through neglect. The British prevailed upon the Todas to give up this practice.

The Toda language is handed down from parents to children and has no script. Both men and women cover themselves with a coarse white upper cloth called a puthukuli, which is intricately embroidered with red and blue or black thread at the borders and is worn like a Roman toga. With his light complexion and fine features and a puthukuli over his shoulder, a Toda could be compared to a Roman nobleman.

The main item of Toda diet is rice boiled in buttermilk and served with a slab of butter or ghee.

Many fantastic and some amusing theories have been put forward to explain the origin of the Todas. Some scholars believe that they are a lost tribe of the Hebrews. Others have tried to prove that they are survivors of a Roman colony. Some thought they were descendants of ancient Scythian warriors. The mystery surrounding their origins has served to heighten interest in them. They are most probably from Dravidian stock.

The Todas believe that they are a special race. According to them, their god On went to the top of the Kundha mountain range



with his wife and laid an iron bar across them. He stood at one end of the bar and his wife at the other. He brought forth 1,600 buffaloes from the bowels of the earth, and his wife 1,800. On's buffaloes were the first sacred buffaloes and his wife's were the ordinary ones. Holding on to the tail of the last of the sacred buffaloes was the first Toda. God On took a rib out of him and made a Toda woman. Shortly afterwards, On left the Nilgiri plateau for Amnordr, the world of the dead, to rejoin his son who had been accidentally drowned. His sister Thekershi took his place. It is Goddess Thekershi who the Todas venerate. The division of the Todas into castes, sub-castes and clans is attributed to her.

The Todas were considered 'Lords of the soil'. Gradually the British Government took control and brought the lands under the system of tenure prevalent in the rest of India, reserving for the Todas certain lands known as Todas' patta lands.

The Nilgiri tahr (to give it its scientific name *Hemitragus hylocrius*) has been commonly called 'ibex' in south India, a name given by European hunters. Its Tamil and Malayalam name 'cliff goat' however is descriptive and apt. The tahr too is a creature of mystery. It is the only member of the goat family to be found south of the Himalaya and one of the three species of tahr in the world. It is found along the higher ranges of the southern section of the Western Ghats, from the Nilgiris southwards. How an animal of the temperate region and a near relative of the Himalayan tahr came to be in the tropical zone is difficult to explain. Various theories have been put forward. The theory which perhaps comes closest to explaining the mystery states that at one time, during the glacial age, when the Satpura chain of mountains formed a climatically more temperate link with the Himalaya (through what is now the Rajmahal gap), several Himalayan and Indo-Malayan fauna and

flora, including the Nilgiri tahr, were able to move south. Then, during a warmer period, these animals and plants retreated, taking refuge on the cool heights of the Western Ghats. The two creatures of mystery, the Toda and the tahr came to share a common home in the Nilgiris.





IV

Treated under the guidance of Karnoz's father, the young tahr's wound healed fast. But a big scar around its neck marked it for life. During this period Karnoz kept the tahr kid in the closed pen along with buffalo calves. Soon the tahr kid made friends with its companions. The sounds and smells of the mund and the presence of people did not frighten it anymore. It soon became very tame with Karnoz and Simil and played with them. Before long, Karnoz was able to let it out whenever he was around and the kid made no attempt to run away. Instead, it began following Karnoz wherever he went.

Female Toda buffaloes are very suspicious of strangers, whether man or animal, and are particularly aggressive if they have young calves. One morning, a female buffalo, which had newly calved, seeing the tahr kid play with its calf, attacked the tahr. Kooch was lying in the open space between the huts watching the scene. Sensing the kid was in danger, the dog was up in a flash and, barking sharply to warn it, dashed between the tahr and the angry buffalo. This gave the kid time to escape. Little adventures of this kind made the kid realize that Kooch was not an enemy, but could be trusted. A close friendship developed between the two.



It was time to give the young tahr a name, Karnoz thought. He consulted Simil as they watched the rays of the setting sun on Mukerti Betta, which was, in a sense, the mund's own mountain peak. The golden rays hit the wet rocky summit at an angle, making the peak glow. Then wisps of mist and steam from the rocks made the mountain look like a live volcano. The effect was brief but dramatic and Karnoz and Simil watched fascinated, utterly silent.

"What about 'Betta' (the local name for peaks)?" Simil suggested, breaking the silence. Karnoz was unimpressed. Just then, a cloud formation drew across the scene like a curtain, shutting out the view. "What about Moz?" Simil asked a little peevishly. ('Moz' is mist in the Toda language.) Karnoz smiled. "It's a good name," he agreed. Tahrs are really cloud goats as they live most of their lives among the clouds. And Moz the tahr kid became.

Toda women are good at needlework, particularly embroidery. Simil was better than most at this art and was greatly in demand for decorating puthukulis. Simil embroidered a beautiful collar for Moz and the tahr kid seemed to like wearing it.

By now some months had passed and Moz was growing up fast. He was no longer dependent on milk. So Simil lovingly plucked grass and the tender leaves of jungle plants and creepers and fed Moz. The tahr kid seemed to know what was good for him to eat.

In the afternoon Simil would leave a bundle of fodder in the buffalo calves' pen for Moz and the young calves to feed on. One evening, as she was busy, she asked a youngster to gather the fodder. He brought a bundle, put it in the open and left. Simil happened to pass that way after a while. Moz, who normally ate greedily, stood looking at the pile without eating. On inspection,

Simil found that there were some poisonous weeds in the fodder. Perhaps warned by instinct, Moz had not touched the food and had thus saved the lives of the buffalo calves. Simil told Karnoz what she had seen and then they both reported the incident to Kodan. The elder told the others. Moz not only became a favourite of Mofmund but his name spread to neighbouring munds.

Toda huts have low compound walls of loosely piled stone around them. These prevent buffaloes from rubbing against the huts and damaging them. The narrow entrance ensures that buffaloes cannot enter. Moz's favourite pastime was to run on the compound walls, Kooch chasing him on the ground outside. Moz displayed amazing balance, a skill which was greatly admired by the Todas.

The Todas of Mofmund were also fond of Moz because they thought he brought them luck. Simil's older sister, whose first two children had died at birth, gave birth to a healthy baby after Moz's arrival.



V

Mukerti Betta towers above Mofmund like a giant sentinel watching over the mund. Its peak, shaped like a cone cut in half, is bare and cannot be scaled on three sides except by animals such as the rock-climbing tahr. The approach to the peak is boulder-strewn. Among the rocks, grasses and shrubs sprout. Below the rocks the mountain is a mound of grass with two gently sloping arms. In the depression between the two arms is a heavily wooded shola. The mund is perched on one arm that curves around the shola. To see the peak from the mund, one has only to look over the shola. The broken side of the cone is a sheer precipice all the way down. The only approach is from the east or the mund side. The Todas believed that their souls and those of their buffaloes leaped together to the nether world from the cliff.

Tahr herds from the line of the cliffs on the western edge of the plateau occasionally take refuge on Mukerti. The mountain offers everything a tahr wants—grass and plants to feed on and the cliffs to retreat to in time of danger. It struck Karnoz that this was the obvious future home for Moz. Moreover, here he could keep an eye on the kid as he grew up.

Karnoz realized that it would take time to get Moz accustomed

to his natural home. He could have carried the kid and left him on the mountain top and come away. But Moz would have followed him back. On the other hand, if Moz stayed behind, he would fall prey to a predator, most probably a leopard. Even a jackal could kill a small kid.

Karnoz was worried as to how to get Moz gradually accustomed to Mukerti peak. Then an idea struck him. He knew how fond animals are of salt. Buffaloes were given salt on special occasions and as a treat. Tahr were no exception. He had seen tahr herds crowding around natural salt licks. He decided to use salt as bait.

Karnoz and Simil tempted Moz with salt, so that he would follow them up the mountain a little further each day. But the moment the salt they carried was finished Moz would come racing back to the mund. Although this was discouraging, Karnoz and Simil did not give up the hope that one day Moz would find freedom and that the call of the mountain would become stronger than that of the mund and his friends there.

Meanwhile Moz ran into serious danger and it was all because of his love of salt. The Todas consider their dairies, where they keep their milk vessels, buttermilk churners and other things connected with milk, very special places, in fact sacred. A dairyman-priest called a palol is in charge of each dairy. Women, strangers and animals other than a Toda buffalo are not allowed near a dairy. Only the palol can enter it. The milk and other vessels are also held sacred. A sacred dairy stood on a mound close to Mofmund. Some sacred dairies have a conical roof and the dairy at Mofmund had such a roof. Moz had become so fond of salt, that he would go everywhere looking for it. One day he invaded the sacred dairy in search of salt. The palol was outside milking. When he entered he saw the sacred vessels dislodged and the earthen pots

broken. Moz was inside, in the inner chamber which was the sanctum sanctorum. The palol set up a hue and cry and rushed to the mund. Hearing the commotion everyone came out. "A great sin has been committed. The sacred place has been polluted. A great curse will be on us," the palol cried beating his breast. Moz followed him innocently and the palol started chasing him. Others joined in. In an instant Moz was no longer the loved one; he had become an object of hatred. In the words of an old Toda song:

"He has gone to sacred places where he should not go;
He has looked at Gods he should not look at."

When the sacred dairy is thought to be polluted Toda custom demands that it and the priest should be purified. In some rituals the palol has to undergo hardships, such as spending cold nights almost naked in a shola. In the old days a buffalo sacrifice was also required. When the palol thought about this he became even angrier and chased Moz with ferocity.

Moz, who at first thought it was a game realized that it was no game when sticks and stones hit him. He ran as fast as he could and did not stop until he reached the boulder-strewn slope of Mukerti Betta. Apart from the wounds he sustained, Moz lost the beautiful collar Simil had made for him. It was torn off his neck.

Pollution of a sacred dairy is a serious matter. A *noym* or caste council had to be convened. At the council, in spite of Kodan's pleas on behalf of Moz, the tahr was declared an outlaw. This meant that Moz could be put to death if he ever entered the mund. The palol wanted Moz to be killed by hiring a hunter to shoot him. But Kodan did not agree. "Our only concern is that the animal does not pollute our sacred places again." To soften the palol's

wrath he arranged for Karnoz to contribute most of the manual labour required for the purification ceremonies.

Karnoz was very upset. He blamed himself for Moz becoming





so fond of salt. Meanwhile, Moz had disappeared. After a long search Karnoz found Moz hiding among the rocks half-way up Mukerti slope. He expected the kid to come running at the sight of him, but Moz retreated higher up the peak and disappeared into the cliffs. Karnoz could not follow him there.

Karnoz understood that Moz had become wary and suspicious of all human beings, including himself. He noticed that Moz had suddenly matured and was no longer a kid. This both pleased and saddened Karnoz. The thought that his pet no longer trusted him was saddening but the realization that it was no longer dependent on him was a consolation.

Karnoz then ordered Kooch to chase Moz to the peak if he attempted to return to the mund. Kooch was puzzled. But being an obedient dog he was ready to carry out his master's order.

Having got Moz used to salt, Karnoz felt that some day the young tahr might be tempted to return to the mund. The best way to prevent this, he decided, would be to set up a little salt lick on the mountain itself. He dug a hole among the rocks, put some salt in it and kept replenishing it whenever required. He did not have to do it often as the earth absorbed the salt, making it like a natural salt lick.

Gradually, as Moz gained confidence, he came out of hiding from among the cliffs and extended his feeding range. He had everything he needed on Mukerti Betta itself. Food, water that oozed out from rock crevices, shelter among the cliffs and salt, of course. For companionship he had Karnoz, Simil and Kooch who visited him often. But they had to keep a certain distance as Moz made it clear that the petting days were over. He had indeed become a creature of the wild.



VI

Leopards are skilled hunters. Though small compared to tigers, they are powerful and very agile. Their dull coat, with dark rosette markings, makes them inconspicuous. A leopard that takes to preying on domestic cattle adds cunning to its skill, which makes it much more dangerous.

Such a leopard operated near Mofmund. The Todas called it 'The Lame One' as it limped a little. The Lame One preferred to prey on Toda buffalo calves rather than wild prey as the calves were easier to catch. He visited Toda munds in the area by turn and carried away calves under the Todas' very noses.

The Todas of Mofmund were on their guard against the killer. But they could not be eternally vigilant. The Lame One struck when least expected. The leopard found an ally in the swirling rain and mist that often envelopes Toda country. Sometimes the mist is so thick that one cannot make out an object a couple of metres away.

The Lame One had not visited Mofmund for some months and the Todas of the mund had almost forgotten his existence when he decided to pay a visit. As he made his way across the shola, a drizzle began and low over-hanging clouds settled in. Visibility

around Mukerti Betta became very poor. The leopard quickened his pace and reached the slope leading to the mund. Ahead was a herd of buffalo calves. A Toda boy was driving them home. He was hurrying, but the calves were hanging back.

Herbivorous animals such as deer and tahr possess a keen sense of smell, which seems better developed than their sight and hearing. They can smell an enemy a long way off—even an enemy which is lying hidden—provided the wind is in the right direction. Predators such as tigers and leopards are aware of this and plan their hunting strategy accordingly. They work their way towards their prey upwind—that is, with the wind blowing from the prey towards them—before beginning their final stalk.

As The Lame One followed the buffalo calves, the wind was in the right quarter and steady. But unknown to the leopard, Moz was behind him higher up on the shoulder of the mountain. The wind carried the leopard's scent to the tahr. Instinct told him that it was an enemy. Promptly, Moz sounded a warning. The alarm call of the Nilgiri tahr is a whistle—not a clear whistle but it sounds as if the whistler were wheezing while whistling. Although the whistle is not loud it carries far in the stillness of the Toda country, warning everyone within hearing range of danger. It alerted the Toda boy. He turned round and glimpsed the leopard crouched on a tree. The Lame One was after a calf which had lagged behind the main group. But the boy thought it was hunting him. Shouting, "Aiyoh, aiyoh, a leopard is attacking me," he bolted. The buffalo calves followed him. The Lame One gave a deep growl of disappointment and vanished into the shola. Moz kept up his alarm call until he could scent the leopard no more.

Moz had not been mentioned in the mund after the sacred dairy incident but that evening everyone acknowledged that he

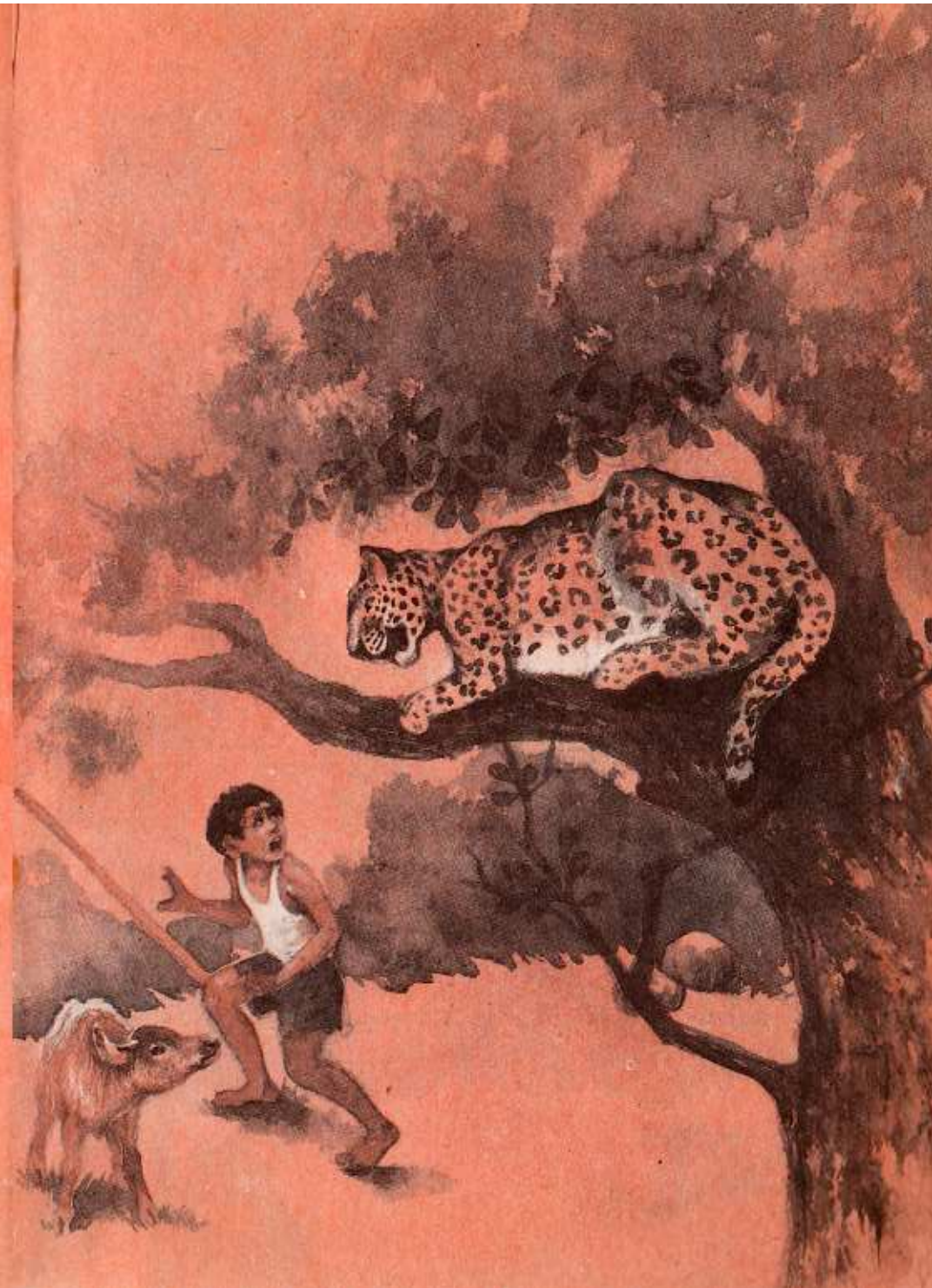
had saved the boy.

Two mornings later, when it was still dark, the palol went as usual to collect water for the dairy. To avoid pollution, a spring some distance away from the mund and up the mountain had been set apart for the dairy. It was cold and he had covered himself in a dark shawl. The Lamé One was prowling on the outskirts of the mund hoping to make a kill. Had the palol been standing still the leopard would not have mistaken him for a buffalo calf but he was bending to fill his pot and, in the uncertain light of a misty dawn, The Lamé One took him for a calf. He began stalking the priest.

Red streaks of dawn were painting the eastern sky and it was feeding time for Moz. Before starting to feed, it was Moz's habit to stand on a spur and view the country around to make sure that no enemy was about. He had a good view of the slope. Had the leopard been still, Moz would not have been able to see it in the half light. But it was creeping forward, stealthily, a step at a time. Moz sounded his alarm call agitatedly. It reached the palol's ears. The palol got up hastily. There, behind him about to spring on him, was The Lamé One. Both were shocked at the discovery. The leopard growled menacingly. The priest's legs turned to lead and he stood rooted to the spot, unable to move. Then to the palol's great relief the leopard turned and walked away.

In the next few days practically everyone in the mund had their version of how narrowly the palol had escaped from The Lamé One. They were sure that the leopard had become a man-eater and would have made a human kill but for Moz's timely warning.

It happened that some Toda elders had assembled to discuss arrangements for the funeral of a Toda elder. Kodan used the occasion to broach the subject of Moz continuing to be an outlaw.





The gathering became very quiet. Then Monegar Kodan pointed out, "We have purified the dairy with Karnoz providing much of the labour." "Our Gods themselves would not like us to hold a grudge forever," the palol volunteered to everyone's surprise. Then everyone started talking at the same time, all praising Moz. The Monegar understood their feelings. He held his hand up, asking for silence. "Shall we lift the ban on Moz? For what he has done for us we ought to give him protection as well," he said. The assembly cheered.

Since the Todas were on the alert The Lamé One decided to abandon hunting buffalo calves and look for other prey. He had observed that the young tahr was all alone. Animals are more difficult to hunt in a herd, so he decided to try his luck with the young tahr.

Moz had certain advantages over buffalo calves. His senses were sharper and, since he invariably occupied high ground, he could detect anything approaching from below. The tahr saw the leopard coming and climbed the rocky peak where he was safe. This happened again the following morning. After several unsuccessful attempts, the leopard began to lose patience. He was very hungry. He became reckless. From the time when the leopard started hunting him Moz never left the high rocky ground and seldom ate. He began to feel the strain and he too became careless. He came a little way down to where the grass was young and tender and began to feed greedily. The Lamé One was watching from the edge of a shola. He quickly made his way to a position above the tahr. Once there, he began to stalk his prey downhill, taking advantage of the boulders. The wind was right. Simil, who happened to look in that direction, saw the whole scene. She called out to Karnoz. All who heard her came out and

watched the hunt helplessly. There was nothing they could do. The hunter and the hunted were too far.

Just as the killer leopard got within striking distance, the wind shifted and gave Moz the enemy's scent. Like a shot from a gun Moz raced towards the cliff. He had to pass close to the leopard to get there. The leopard struck but succeeded in collecting only a pawfull of fur. The chase continued. The tahr reached the cliff's edge ahead of the leopard. There were tahr trails among the Mukerti cliffs and Moz was familiar with them. He made for the nearest one and just managed to get to the cliffs and safety. The leopard, close on Moz's heels, realized too late the danger he was in. Unable to check his speed, he rushed headlong to the edge of the cliffs. For a brief moment he hung on to a rock—then he disappeared from view. The next morning the Todas saw the battered body of The Lone One on a slab of rock. Vultures were already gathering for a feast.

The Todas of Mofmund called their neighbours and celebrated that night. As the women prepared a feast, the men danced.

The Toda dance, though simple, has great vigour and vitality. The men gather in a circle, facing inwards, put their arms round the waists of their neighbours on either side and hop in unison, raising one foot at a time, and go round and round singing a gruff, low pitched "O haw how, O haw how" at intervals. The chorus boomed and swelled into a roar like the Pykara river in flood and mingled with the night. As they danced, the mund poet sang an old Toda song:

"You have fallen into the precipitous place
Like a buffalo gone wild
You have fallen into rocky ground."



VII

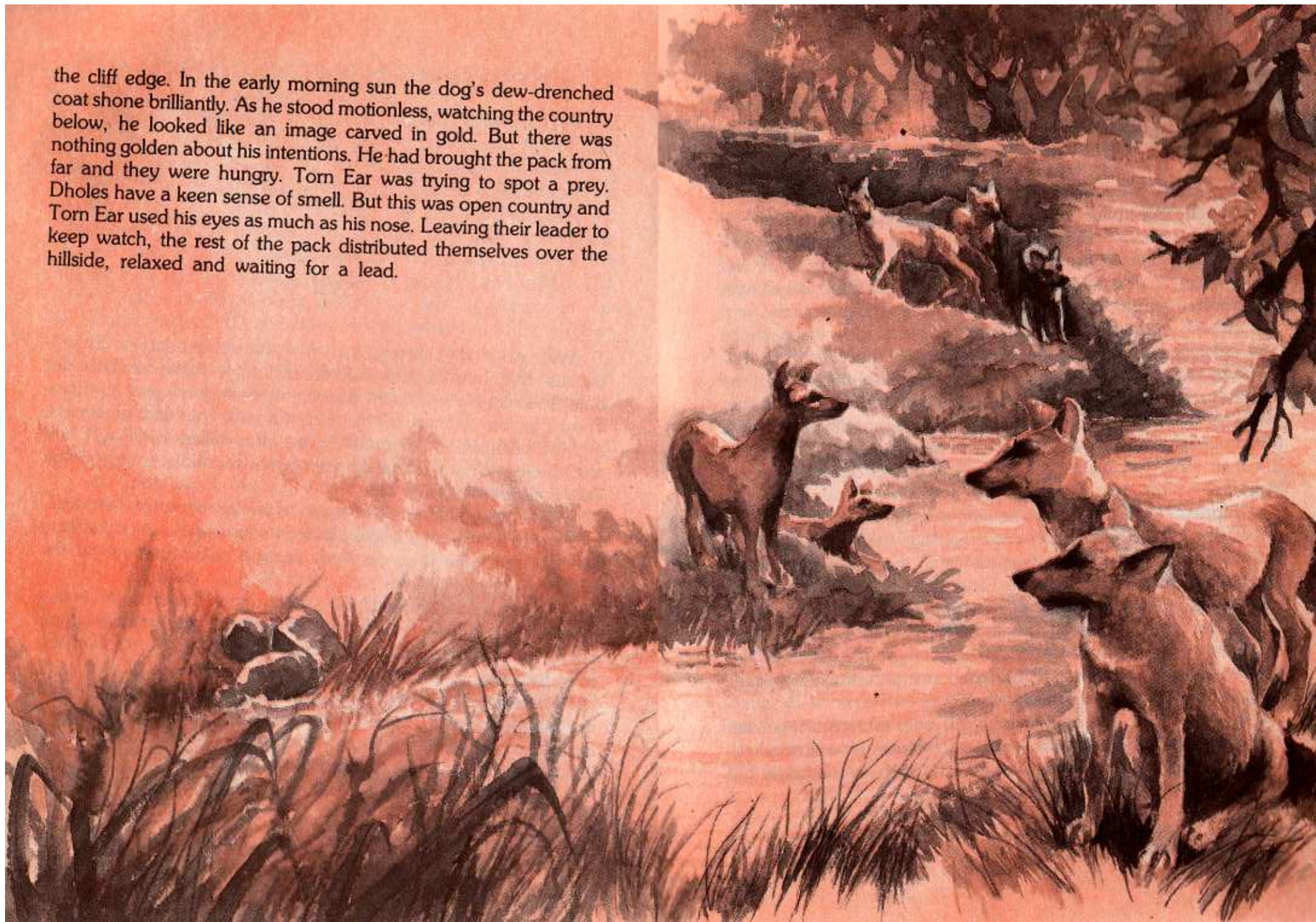
Wild dogs are among the most feared predators. This is because they hunt in packs and are difficult to shake off. They are bold and fearless and even the mighty tiger gives way to them. They look like ordinary village dogs but have rounded, erect ears, and are brick red in colour. They are often called 'red dogs', and also dholes. What particularly distinguishes a dhole from a village dog is its bushy black tail.

Wild dogs mainly live and breed in the low country. Periodically they move up to the Nilgiri plateau and sweep across it, hunting as they go. They prey on Toda buffalo calves if they get the chance.

Torn Ear was the leader of a dhole pack, which spent a few months on the plateau each year. Torn Ear got his name because one of his ears got torn when he attempted to seize a sambur stag from the front. The stag lunged its sharp pointed antlers at Torn Ear's head, missed and got his right ear. It was a lucky escape and the experience made the dog cunning as well as courageous. Torn Ear was a good leader and the pack, which consisted of nine dogs including two young ones, prospered under him.

Torn Ear was in the lead as the pack topped a hill not far from

the cliff edge. In the early morning sun the dog's dew-drenched coat shone brilliantly. As he stood motionless, watching the country below, he looked like an image carved in gold. But there was nothing golden about his intentions. He had brought the pack from far and they were hungry. Torn Ear was trying to spot a prey. Dholes have a keen sense of smell. But this was open country and Torn Ear used his eyes as much as his nose. Leaving their leader to keep watch, the rest of the pack distributed themselves over the hillside, relaxed and waiting for a lead.



In the distance, beyond two gently rising hills, Torn Ear made out a herd of tahr. There were eleven of them and they were busy grazing on the tender young grass that had sprouted in a burnt-out patch.

Torn Ear was the dominant male in the pack. This was not his only qualification to lead. Female dholes are also pack leaders. He was a clever hunter and his hunting strategy suited the type of country they hunted in and the prey they were after. Torn Ear could make out that the patch of young grass extended like a finger far into the country, away from the cliffs. Gradually the tahr herd was moving further inland. Torn Ear decided to wait. His patience was rewarded. The tahr moved away from the cliffs.

Torn Ear got up and signalled the start of the hunt. Two of the swiftest runners moved ahead and took position along the cliff line, to cut off the tahr herd's retreat. Leading the rest of the pack, he set out in pursuit. The dogs appeared to be moving at a leisurely pace. But their lope was deceptive. They were in fact covering ground very fast.

Chipped Horn, an old female with a broken horn tip, was the leader of the tahr herd. She heard the dogs before seeing them. Two sub-adult hunters had whimpered in their excitement. She had been hunted by dhole before, and did not panic. Warning the herd by stamping her forefeet, she turned and ran towards the cliffs, followed by the rest of the herd. The wild dogs gave chase. It was a long race and the dogs steadily gained ground. The tahr ran with confidence; they hoped to reach the security of the cliffs before the dogs caught up with them.

Although the cliffs have trails which only tahr can negotiate, they are but few. The paths leading to them are well marked. Chipped Horn made for one of them. The path seemed clear but

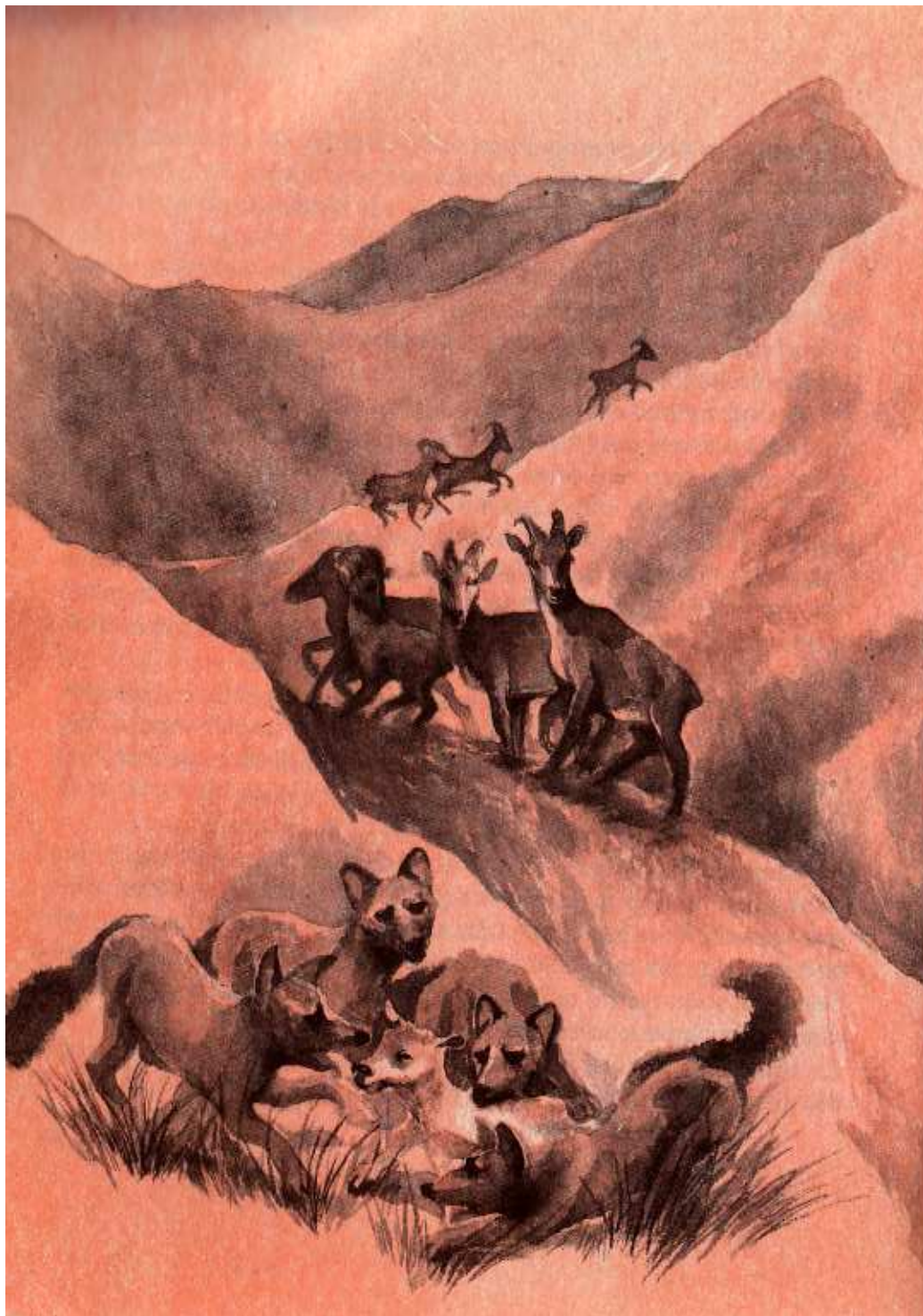
just then from behind a boulder, a dog jumped up. Chipped Horn wheeled to the left and ran parallel to the cliffs towards the next trail. The trail was down a ravine and was hidden from view. The herd increased its pace but the dhole made no special effort. The tahr herd reached the ravine only to find a dhole waiting to meet them there. There was confusion when Chipped Horn found this second route to the cliffs cut off. The next trail was quite far away. But the hesitation was momentary. Chipped Horn decided to seek the security of Mukerti peak where she had taken refuge before.

There was a young male tahr in the herd. He disputed Chipped Horn's leadership and often challenged her authority. He thought that Chipped Horn had made a mistake in trying to reach Mukerti. He therefore decided to break away from the herd and headed straight for the cliffs. This was the sort of opportunity Torn Ear was waiting for. The breakaway tahr was overtaken and the dogs fell upon him from every side, tearing large chunks of flesh out of their victim, until it died of shock and loss of blood.

Wild dogs are fast and greedy feeders. In a short time there was nothing left of the tahr except for the horns, hooves and a few bones. But the dogs' hunger remained unsatisfied, especially that of the late comers. So, Torn Ear again led the pack on the track of the fleeing herd.

Chipped Horn had a good start. But tahr are not made for running on soft ground, nor long distances. Besides, there were young ones in the herd. The tahr also had not expected the hunt to be resumed. So they were moving unhurriedly towards Mukerti Betta. As soon as the tahr realized that the dhole were again after them it became a race for life.

From his commanding position on Mukerti Betta, Moz watched the hunt.



The dhole were hunting silently except for an occasional "Yap, Yap," to give direction to the pack. The wild dogs were running like a relay team, in laps. As the front runners got tired, their places were taken by their companions. This put great pressure on the quarry.

As Moz watched, the dogs steadily gained ground. But by then the tahr herd had reached the base of the mountain. Only the mountain itself remained to be climbed. The youngest of the kids, however, was utterly exhausted now and began faltering. The lead dogs took bites off it as it ran until it fell. It disappeared under the dogs with a heart-rendering scream. This brief pause in the chase helped the others gain valuable ground. Thoroughly shaken, Moz was the first to flee into the cliff, followed by Chipped Horn and the rest of the herd.

The herd soon recovered from the effects of the chase and began to settle down and lead a normal life. There were two young males about the same age as Moz in the herd and naturally there were frequent sparring matches among the three. In the beginning Moz, who had had no occasion to engage in fights, got the worst of the exchanges but as the days went by, he learned to defend himself and to signal submission when he found himself losing and did not wish to continue the fight. To avoid unnecessary and long-drawn-out fights, wild animals have adopted gestures of submission and superiority. Moz had to learn these but the better care and feeding which he had had, began to tell and in due course Moz became one of the leaders.

As the peak of the breeding season approached, Chipped Horn became restless. She would climb Mukerti Betta every day and spend long hours surveying the countryside to make sure that wild dog packs were not roaming about. Having satisfied herself that

there was no danger, she took the lead and headed towards the main cliff line. This was a crucial moment in Moz's life: should he remain on the mountain with the friendly Todas nearby or go out into the wider tahr country. The call to adventure won.

Chipped Horn's herd met other herds. Sometimes two or three herds would join to make a large group. Occasionally, when good grazing was confined to particular areas, many herds would merge.

As Moz grew older his colour began to change. From grey his coat became brown and then deepened to chocolate. He grew sturdy. Moz had now become what hunters call a 'brown buck'. This stage in development from adolescence to maturity is marked by aggression between young male tahr.

Mature male tahr are not permanently attached to any herd. They usually join herds during the breeding season and leave afterwards. Unlike some species of animals which have a fixed breeding season, Nilgiri tahr breed most of the year but the breeding season reaches its peak during the south-west monsoon.

Chipped Horn's herd swelled to twenty with females, kids and sub-adults. A fine male tahr joined the herd. This male had two distinguishing features, a big scar across its face caused by a bullet, and a patch of lighter coloured hair which sat like a saddle mark on its deep brown back. The saddle mark is acquired with age and the males possessing them are referred to as 'saddle backs'. They make up about ten per cent of the tahr population.

Scar Face was older and stronger than Moz. He recognized Moz as a rival and gave the younger tahr no peace. Moz left the herd and took to wandering. In the course of his wanderings he met other male tahr driven away from herds by stronger rivals. They formed an all-male herd of their own and ranged over the hills. There were five of them, including a very old saddle back

almost black in colour, whose near-white saddle flashed in the sun and advertised his presence a long way off.

One morning when the tahr were feeding on a hillside, the old male, who was feeding beside Moz, suddenly dropped, legs thrashing the air and blood spouting from his side. A moment later, there was a deafening report, like a clap of thunder. Moz's friends took off as if the devil was after them. It took Moz only an instant to realize that this meant danger. Taking the lead he headed towards Mukerti Betta.

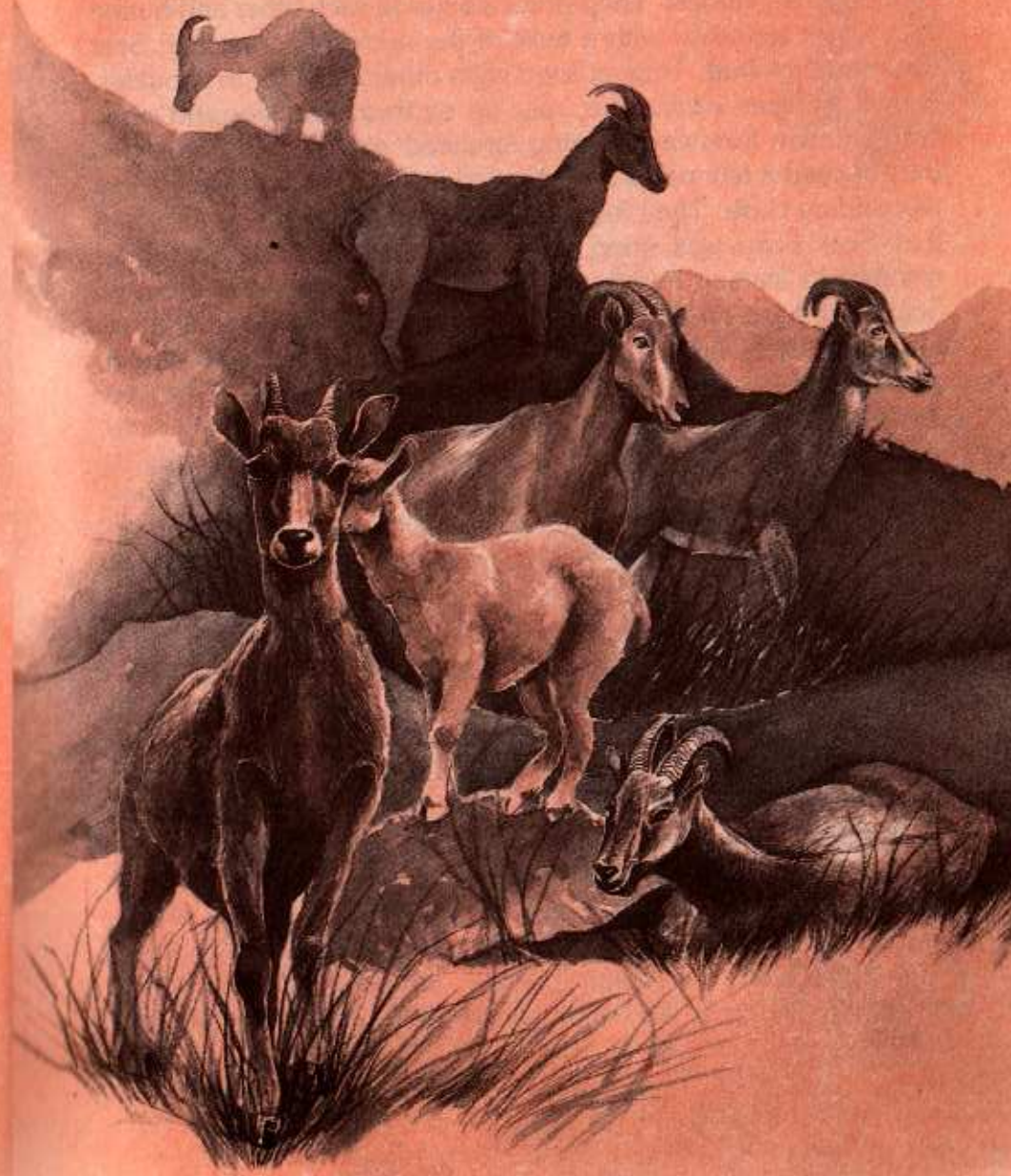


VIII

Karnoz would not have recognized Moz but for the scar round his neck. Moz, however, had no difficulty in recognizing Karnoz from his scent. While the rest of the male herd ran into the security of the cliffs at the sight of the Todas, Moz let Karnoz, Simil and Kooch approach to within a stone's throw.

Moz's all-male herd lived on Mukerti Betta for some months. Karnoz saw to it that no hunter approached them. Moz fed and rested and sparred with his friends. Moz was beginning to acquire a saddle and his horns swept backwards in a deep curve like a sickle. Towards the beginning of the rains an urge came upon Moz, a powerful drive to rejoin the mixed herd. The other males were equally restless. One fine morning Moz's tahr group abruptly left Mukerti and made for the main tahr country.

The scent of Chipped Horn's herd, carried by the wind, reached them from far away. Scar Face's scent hit Moz like a punch on the nose. This spurred Moz forward until he stood facing Scar Face and challenged him to battle. Scar Face tried to ignore the challenge, but when Moz persisted, Scar Face stood hunched, arching his back, presenting a formidable profile. This would have frightened away most challengers but Moz was not impressed. He



felt power surging within him and was determined to fight.

As neither the challenger nor the challenged would yield, the fight began in earnest. They stood alongside each other and butted each other sideways with a twist of the neck. Moz matched Scar Face, butt for butt. They pushed each other shoulder to shoulder. Next they faced each other, rose up on their hind legs and came swiftly down, forehead meeting forehead with a loud thud. Then they backed a few paces and charged forward, horns meeting in a resounding clash. They fought furiously and soon it was apparent that Scar Face was tiring. To avoid being butted, Scar Face resorted to leaning heavily on Moz. Moz disengaged and butted Scar Face hard on the rump. Scar Face lost his balance and fell. Moz did not take advantage of his fallen enemy, but allowed him to get up and flee. Moz was left in possession of the herd.



IX

A herd of tahr, Moz among them, was resting on a mountain slope, when suddenly an adult female which had occupied a prominent look-out point, stamped her feet. Far below on a well marked cattle trail was a magnificent tiger, a thick-set heavy animal. After the initial clamour died down, the herd took no further notice of the tiger. Nor did the tiger show any interest in the tahr. This tiger became a familiar sight.

The days passed peacefully by. One evening the herd saw a tiger in the distance. After a few half-hearted alarm whistles the herd settled down. The tiger disappeared from view. The herd continued to graze towards an outcrop of rocks with the idea of lying there for the night. Crouching among the rocks was a tiger which had rightly guessed the intention of the herd, worked its way there and was lying in ambush. Moz was in the lead and was feeding directly towards the tiger. The tiger was absolutely still except for its tail, the tip of which twitched violently. Not even a blade of grass stirred to give its scent to the tahr herd. A few more paces and Moz would have been within range of the tiger. Just then a young female overtook Moz and climbed the nearest rock. It was the very rock behind which the tiger was lying. Before the tahr

could gather its wits the tiger sprang and struck it down.

This was a different tiger, a sleek, young animal, an expert stalker. It concentrated on wild animals—tahr, sambur and barking deer. It did not take the tahr long to distinguish between this tiger and the old cattle-lifter. But troubles do not come singly. A black leopard also took up residence in tahr country and began to harry them.

The biggest problem for saddle backs was the human trophy hunter. Bokka was a hunters' guide; a professional shikari. He was in the tahr country to mark down saddle backs and their locations



for a sportsman. When he first sighted Moz he could not believe his eyes. Moz had developed a fine saddle but what impressed Bokka more were the saddle back's horns. He was sure that Moz carried a record pair. He made a mental note of the area and rushed back to report to his employer.

Bokka's employer was Ranjit Singhji whose ambition was to bag a specimen of every game animal allowed to be shot on a licence. He had not shot a Nilgiri tahr. When Bokka reported his find, Ranjit Singhji was sceptical, as shikaris tend to exaggerate.

Nevertheless, the shikar party was on its way the very next day. They camped in tahr country. It was absolutely quiet except for the calls of birds and wild animals. The streams were clear and



sparkling. It was a wilderness the like of which Ranjit Singhji had never seen.

The hunters came across a large herd of tahr, but Moz was not among them. In trying to get past the herd to search the country beyond, Bokka unwittingly gave himself away to an alert female and the herd bolted. As they were making off, Moz, who was feeding in a nearby hollow, joined in the flight. Ranjit Singhji raised his powerful binoculars. As an experienced hunter he was a good judge of heads. Even at that distance he was sure that Moz's horns were more than the record 44.5 cms.

The shikar party combed the area for the next few days but the animal seemed to have vanished. During this time Bokka took his employer within easy range of a fine saddle back, but he refused to shoot it as he had set his heart on getting a record head; only one was allowed on a licence. A few days later Bokka located Moz a long way off but just as the hunter was half way through his long stalk, ground mist rose from the valley below and covered the plateau in a white cottonwool blanket, cutting visibility to a few metres. When the mist dispersed the tahr had disappeared.

If it was not the mist that covered the countryside for hours, it was the fickle wind of that time of the year which interfered with the hunt. Moz seemed to sense the danger and was ever alert. He took to living on his own and would dash down the cliffs at the least sign of danger.

One day Bokka planned that they should get up earlier than usual to start the hunt. As Bokka had suspected, Moz too had got out early to feed and was grazing his way back to the cliffs. Their saddle back was a long way away and the question was whether the hunters would reach their quarry before it reached the security of the cliffs. Taking advantage of outcrops of rocks, folds in the

ground, and, when there was no other cover, burnt out rhododendron stumps, Bokka took the sportsman swiftly and surely closer to the prize. Only two hundred and fifty metres or so separated them. By means of sign language, Bokka offered to take the sportsman closer for a sure shot. But Ranjit Singhji was too excited to listen. Besides, the quarry was showing signs of nervousness. The sportsman aimed quickly and fired. Moz dropped like a stone. "Good shot, sir," cried Bokka as the two raced to claim the trophy.

Closer inspection of the fallen animal proved beyond doubt that the horns were a record size. While the two men were gloating over their prize, Moz stirred. The bullet had grazed his spine, stunning him. "Quick, put in another bullet," the shikari shouted. Moz struggled to his feet. Ranjit raised his rifle and fired. There was only a dull click. He had forgotten to reload. By this time Moz had reached the edge of a sheer drop and, with one last effort, he forced himself over the edge.

The hunters rushed to the spot and stared down, expecting to see their trophy go crashing from rock to rock, to the valley far below. But there was nothing to be seen. Moz had vanished.



X

Karnoz noticed that hunting activity had suddenly increased. Word had got around that there was a remarkable saddle back on the Nilgiri plateau. This brought sportsmen from all over the world.

One day Bokka came to Mofmund on the pretext of buying a buffalo for tiger bait, but really to see if Moz was on Mukerti Betta. Karnoz got talking to him and through clever questioning found out that the saddle back everyone was after was identified by the scar collar round his neck. To get more information Karnoz offered to help find the record saddle back. Bokka told Karnoz everything—about the last great hunt, and his belief that Moz was still alive.

When Moz had rolled over the edge of the plateau a rocky ledge had broken his fall. The ledge sloped inwards so Moz slid towards the rock face into a hollow out of sight of the hunters. There he lay, bleeding and in agony. He could not reach the wound with his tongue to clean it. It therefore took a long time to heal. When Moz was finally able to move, he was too frightened to leave the shelter. Ultimately thirst and hunger won. He climbed up the cliff late one evening when everything was quiet, fed on the grass and plants close by and drank from a stream flowing out of a large shola. The shola looked cool and inviting and had plenty of

cover. Moz decided to take shelter there. Normally tahr avoid sholas for fear of predators which lurk there. But between man and tigers and leopards the carnivores seemed the lesser evil!

Meanwhile, Bokka had been scouring the tahr country. He picked out the tracks of a large male tahr in the bed of a stream beside a shola. He came upon its fresh droppings and saw some flakes of dried blood. Here was the evidence he was looking for. He hurried back to call Ranjit Singhji.

Karnoz had been disturbed by the talk with Bokka. He told Simil what he had heard and they discussed various ways of saving Moz. They decided to put the problem to Monegar Kodan. He suggested that the best strategy would be to scare away the tahr from the hunters. He reasoned that the monsoon rains would soon break and the hunters would have to go away. This would give Moz some relief for the next three months.

Two Toda young men volunteered to accompany Karnoz. Bokka and Ranjit Singhji reached the tahr country about the same time as the Todas. The Todas knew the area as well, if not better than Bokka. They went to work quietly. They always managed to get ahead of the hunters and would disturb any tahr they found so that they could elude the hunters. They particularly kept an eye open for Moz. Shortly afterwards two more hunting parties reached the tahr country on the same quest. The three Todas split up, and worked independently to cover each party. Hunters caught sight of them occasionally, but did not suspect them as they appeared busy gathering material for thatching their huts.

One night Karnoz camped in the shola where Moz was sheltering. As soon as Moz picked up the human scent, he got ready to bolt, but something familiar in the smell made him hesitate. Then Karnoz, who had lit a fire, sang a Toda love song:

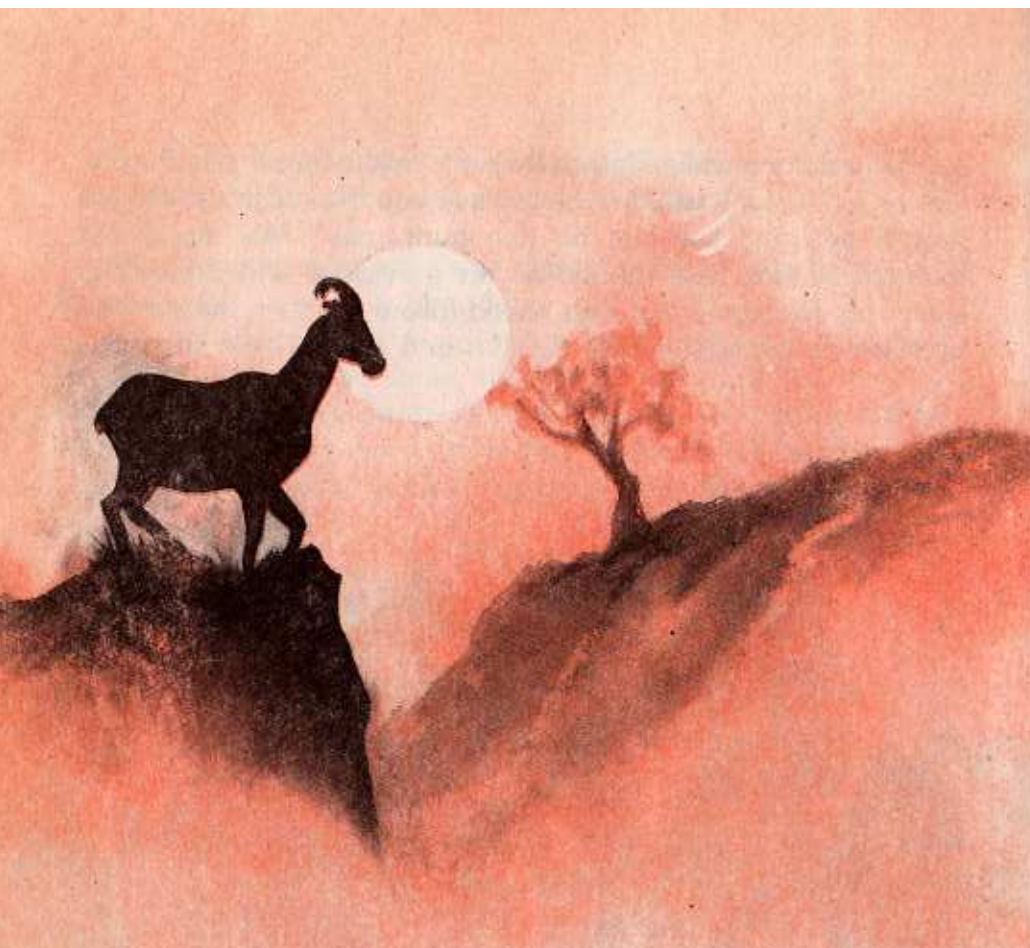
"...If you became the dark night I would desire to become like the white moth and dance."

Moz recognized his voice and spent the night in the shola—the first peaceful night in a long time.

Moz usually came out very early in the morning and fed on the hill slopes close to the shola. He retired back into the shola or moved to a new shola before the hunters were up. Karnoz was an early riser. When he came out to wash in the stream he saw Moz. He was greatly relieved to find his friend alive. After watching the

saddle back for a while, Karnoz began to talk to Moz in a low voice. "Moz, you know it will be nice to have you back with us. We will protect you and see that no one hurts you." Moz stood and listened. Karnoz had finished all his provisions and decided to leave, but he hoped that Moz would follow. By then the sun was up. Karnoz turned towards the sun and saluted it in the Toda





manner by raising his open right hand to his forehead and uttering the single word, "Somy", meaning Swami, the Almighty.

The following evening, when the day's work was done, Karnoz and Simil walked some distance up Mukerti Betta, sat on a rock and watched the sunset on the mountain peak. There, amidst the smoking mist, stood Moz. Simil let out a great shout of joy which brought all the Todas out of their huts. A roar of welcome from the assembled Todas greeted the animal. Moz was home.



XI

Soon after the monsoon, Bokka was back in the tahr country determined to find the famous saddle back. After searching along the cliff line for fresh signs and not finding any, he went to Mukerti Betta. What should he find there but a saddle back grazing peacefully on the mountain slope. His heart missed a beat. He put up his field glasses and found that the saddle back was none other than the record head! What was more surprising was that the animal which had led him such a dance, was feeding in full view of the mund, unafraid! He now began to suspect that there was some special relationship between the tahr and the Todas.

Bokka tried to slip away unseen. But Karnoz had noticed his arrival and barred his path. He was aware of the shikari's intentions and thought that the Monegar would be the best person to deal with him. Kodan told Bokka about Moz's life and how they loved the animal. He added, by way of warning, that the Todas were determined to give Moz protection. He told Bokka to warn other hunters.

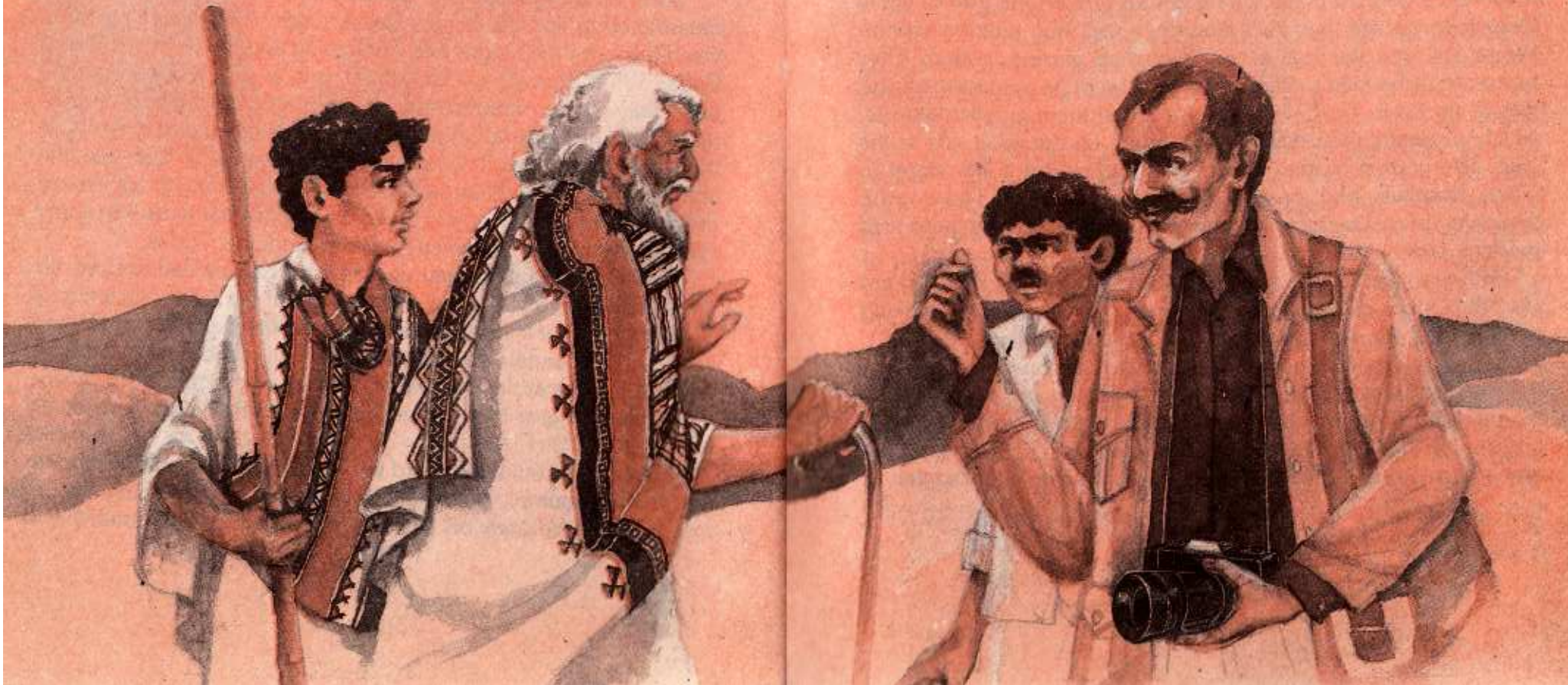
The shikari could not afford to offend the Todas. His livelihood was in their country. But what would he say to Ranjit Singhji who was back in the area on Bokka's invitation? Bokka could have

taken him on a wild goose chase but he decided to be honest. When he told the sportsman the story, he expected him to fly into a rage. Instead, Ranjit hugged Bokka and told the shikari to take him to the tahr. He showed Bokka his cameras and said, "I have exchanged my guns for these."

The expedition that he led the following day was new to Bokka. It did not take Ranjit Singhji long to convince the Todas of Mofmund. They welcomed him and gave him all the help he needed. Moz also cooperated and posed for the camera hunter,

while keeping his distance, of course. The saddle back's fame spread. Realizing that the Nilgiri tahr were endangered the Government banned hunting and gave the species full protection under the Wildlife (Protection) Act. Karnoz could now relax. He had only poachers to contend with and was confident that he and the Todas could deal with them.

Moz reached old age, living a solitary life, secure on Mukerti Betta. But tahr herds in the main tahr country were witnessing many changes. Acacia, eucalyptus and pine plantations made



rapid inroads into the grass hills and in many places reached the very edge of the plateau, interfering with movements of the herds and restricting their feeding grounds. A more disturbing development was the proposed location of a giant hydroelectric project in the area. The Todas, being optimists by nature, were hopeful that everything would turn out all right.

The abundant rainfall, perennial mountain streams, valleys where water could be stored and natural slopes which would give water-power to generate electricity made the Nilgiri plateau the ideal site for a hydroelectric project. Soon work was in progress on a dam across a stream in the valley below the mund. This was going to be one of the main dams. The Todas realized too late that they would have to make a long detour around the lake to get to Ooty town to sell their milk and ghee and buy their provisions. Worse still was the loss of some of their grazing ground. They protested, submitted petitions, and even went on a hunger strike. It was of no avail. The Government allotted them an alternate site, which was not half as good as Mofmund, on the other side of the lake. The grazing ground was much smaller. But it was closer to Ooty, hospitals and bazaars—and schools. The Todas were beginning to realize the importance of education to keep pace with modern India.

Although Kodan was deeply attached to Mofmund and did not like the idea of moving, he joined the others in making preparations for the move once the decision was taken.

The dam was completed. The next monsoon would fill it. And the monsoon was not far away. The young men and women made a temporary shelter at the new site and began building new brick and mortar houses with government assistance. These were like any village house, the new mund like any ordinary hamlet.

Kodan was usually up before the dairy-man and was the first to salute the sun. He was not seen in his usual place on the mound in front of the mund one morning. Karnoz hurried to his hut to see if anything was wrong. He found Kodan dead. The Todas were grief stricken. It was said that the elder could not take so many rapid changes in his environment and died of stress and a broken heart.

Kodan had been a loved and respected elder besides being the Monegar. The Todas wanted to make his funeral a grand affair. Invitations were sent through messengers to all munds, Badaga and Kota friends, officials and well-wishers. On the appointed day a large crowd gathered to honour the departed Toda. Funeral rites, however, had begun some days earlier.

The ceremony is elaborate. Kodan's body was first laid out in his hut and then shifted to different places at each of which a different set of rites was performed before it was taken to the cremation site many hours later. The Kotas provided the music. Besides an umbrella to protect the deceased from the sun and rain on his journey to the next world, articles such as food, tobacco, money, etc. were cremated with him. In earlier days buffaloes were also sacrificed in the belief that the Toda should have his own herd to tend in the world where he was going. Kodan's status would have called for the sacrifice of as many as six buffaloes. These animals had their horns smeared with butter and were driven to the funeral place. The noise and commotion maddened the fierce buffaloes and catching them was the most thrilling part of the ceremony. Young men showed off their prowess and were often badly injured. As the government had banned animal sacrifices this ritual was enacted without actually killing the buffaloes. The funeral pyre was lit by rubbing two sticks of a particular shola tree together. With the collection of relics, such as a lock of the dead man's hair, a

rapid inroads into the grass hills and in many places reached the very edge of the plateau, interfering with movements of the herds and restricting their feeding grounds. A more disturbing development was the proposed location of a giant hydroelectric project in the area. The Todas, being optimists by nature, were hopeful that everything would turn out all right.

The abundant rainfall, perennial mountain streams, valleys where water could be stored and natural slopes which would give water-power to generate electricity made the Nilgiri plateau the ideal site for a hydroelectric project. Soon work was in progress on a dam across a stream in the valley below the mund. This was going to be one of the main dams. The Todas realized too late that they would have to make a long detour around the lake to get to Ooty town to sell their milk and ghee and buy their provisions. Worse still was the loss of some of their grazing ground. They protested, submitted petitions, and even went on a hunger strike. It was of no avail. The Government allotted them an alternate site, which was not half as good as Mofmund, on the other side of the lake. The grazing ground was much smaller. But it was closer to Ooty, hospitals and bazaars—and schools. The Todas were beginning to realize the importance of education to keep pace with modern India.

Although Kodan was deeply attached to Mofmund and did not like the idea of moving, he joined the others in making preparations for the move once the decision was taken.

The dam was completed. The next monsoon would fill it. And the monsoon was not far away. The young men and women made a temporary shelter at the new site and began building new brick and mortar houses with government assistance. These were like any village house, the new mund like any ordinary hamlet.

Kodan was usually up before the dairy-man and was the first to salute the sun. He was not seen in his usual place on the mound in front of the mund one morning. Karnoz hurried to his hut to see if anything was wrong. He found Kodan dead. The Todas were grief stricken. It was said that the elder could not take so many rapid changes in his environment and died of stress and a broken heart.

Kodan had been a loved and respected elder besides being the Monegar. The Todas wanted to make his funeral a grand affair. Invitations were sent through messengers to all munds, Badaga and Kota friends, officials and well-wishers. On the appointed day a large crowd gathered to honour the departed Toda. Funeral rites, however, had begun some days earlier.

The ceremony is elaborate. Kodan's body was first laid out in his hut and then shifted to different places at each of which a different set of rites was performed before it was taken to the cremation site many hours later. The Kotas provided the music. Besides an umbrella to protect the deceased from the sun and rain on his journey to the next world, articles such as food, tobacco, money, etc. were cremated with him. In earlier days buffaloes were also sacrificed in the belief that the Toda should have his own herd to tend in the world where he was going. Kodan's status would have called for the sacrifice of as many as six buffaloes. These animals had their horns smeared with butter and were driven to the funeral place. The noise and commotion maddened the fierce buffaloes and catching them was the most thrilling part of the ceremony. Young men showed off their prowess and were often badly injured. As the government had banned animal sacrifices this ritual was enacted without actually killing the buffaloes. The funeral pyre was lit by rubbing two sticks of a particular shola tree together. With the collection of relics, such as a lock of the dead man's hair, a

each was to take, one of them said suddenly, "Look! look!" Moz was coming down the peak. He kept on coming. Word spread. Women and children came out. Moz stopped as he drew level with the mund. He gazed at the crowd for a long moment. Everyone held their breath and watched. Not a child whimpered. It seemed as if the spirit of the mountain had come down to bless them. Then, setting his face towards the distant cliffs, old Moz headed towards them, slowly and wearily. There was not a single dry eye in the crowd. Some wept openly. In bidding farewell to the old saddle back, the Todas knew that they were bidding farewell to an era that would never return.

"For me the lamp burns in the midst of smoke,
For me the sun shines in the midst of clouds."

